

## Third of July by orphan\_account

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**Summary:**

Joyce, Will, Hopper, and Jane go on an outing. Hopper gets nostalgic.

## Third of July

The little group made an hour drive to the fair a few counties over. Hopper had spent the past few months slowly incorporating Jane into the real world, shuttling her and her friends between the cabin and Joyce's house to make up for lost time.

Once in awhile, the two of them would go on drives much like this one, venturing out of Hawkins so Jane could experience the regular day to day of a small town without being under the scrutiny of the people in their own.

Hopper had the idea for the little trip after picking Jane up from movie night at the Byers a few weeks back. The feature film was Grease and she told him about the music, bitching clothes, and the fair with rides and games that closed out the movie.

In a town like Hawkins, going to the fair was an annual tradition. Everyone gathering in the shared interest of eating artery clogging food and getting out of the house to enjoy the warm weather. It was something he didn't give much thought until he considered how new and interesting it must be in her eyes.

Hopper invited the Byers to join them, making up for the fact that he realistically couldn't take all the kids along much to Jane's disappointment.

Jonathan couldn't make it now that he and Nancy were busy working for the local newspaper. Joyce, on the other hand, was experiencing a lot more free time. Her hours at Melvald's had been cut significantly as all the local businesses struggled to compete with the opening of the new mall.

When they arrive at the dirt lot, Hopper ignores the attendants directing him to park in the next open spot, drives to the perimeter of the marked off area, and takes the first spot there.

Joyce glances at him knowingly. All his moves were calculated to ensure the safety of everyone around him. If something were to happen, he could drive straight through the flimsy rope and get them

out of there fast.

“All right, you two,” Joyce turns in her seat to find Jane peacefully sleeping, her head resting on Will’s shoulder, as Will set his comic book aside.

After some bickering with Hopper, Jane was allowed to sit in the middle seat. She loved her friends and liked to be close to them, their physical presence comforting to her after months of seeing them disappear into thin air.

Joyce places a hand on Jane’s knee and gently shakes it. “Hey, sleepyhead, we’re here.”

Hopper watches in the rear view mirror as she wipes the sleep from her eyes and unbuckles her seatbelt.

“The fair?”

Will nods quickly and points over her shoulder. “Look, it’s over there!” Jane turns in her seat with a small gasp. “Cool, huh?”

Joyce smiles as she slides out of her seat, pulling it forward so she can let the kids out. Joyce rustles through her bag quickly. “Come here, honey.” She says as she squirts sunblock into her palm.

“I put some on before we left.”

Joyce drops the bottle into her bag and narrows her eyes as Will crawls out from the back of the car. “And you got your face too?” Joyce can detect the very distinct scent of the lotion as he stands beside her.

“Jane?”

The girl drops Hopper’s hand as he helps her out of Joyce’s small car, craning her neck to look over the top of it at Joyce.

She slathered herself in sunblock back at the house after Will explained why he was.

“I put some on too. Thank you, though.”

Joyce scrunches up her nose at the sunblock that she didn't need either. Just like the kids she had very diligently applied before they left.

"Hopper?" She raises her hand toward him.

He slams the door and pockets the keys. "Already did."

"He didn't." Jane steps away from Hopper to join Joyce and Will on the other side of the car.

Hopper huffs out a laugh and places his hands on the hood of the car. "I don't believe in that stuff. I can handle a little sun."

Joyce rolls her eyes at the stupid excuse and thinks of the ridiculous sunburns she has seen him sport in the past.

"You don't believe in sunscreen?" Will repeats skeptically.

Jane glares at Hopper. "The rays are ultra violent." She says with an edge to her voice. "Not safe."

"It's ultraviolet, kid." Hopper notes her stoic face, then looks to Joyce and Will who were both regarding him with meaningful stares of their own.

He lets the silence hang for a few seconds and then takes his sunglasses off with a sigh of exasperation as Joyce rounds the car rubbing her hands together.

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They make their way through the dirt lot toward the front entrance of the fair. Joyce and Hopper trail behind Jane and Will who are excitedly talking amongst themselves, Will pointing up and naming the different rides that fill the skyline.

"She's excited."

Joyce hums and watches the pair bumping shoulders and laughing. "So is he."

The two had clicked instantly. It was like they had known each other their whole lives upon first meeting. Joyce and Hopper found comfort in the relationship between the children.

The other kids were all caring and thoughtful but they couldn't even begin to relate to what Jane and Will had experienced, and neither could Joyce and Hopper. The two shared a sixth sense, often communicating without words and fully understanding one another perfectly.

As they wait to buy tickets, Hopper starts setting some ground rules of which there aren't many.

"This is all up to you two. You lead, we follow." He didn't have to say too much because there was a mutual understanding about these things.

Joyce stifles a laugh at the girl blowing a bubble with disinterest as Hopper steps up to pay. "Where do you think you'll start?" Joyce wiggles her arm that Jane is holding onto.

"I don't know." She says with a shrug.

"Maybe they'll have a map!" Will steps in front of them to offer up the solution. "That way we can figure out what we definitely want to do."

Hopper comes up behind Will and drops his hand in front of the boy's face, map in tow.

Will smiles at Jane and his mother as he snatches the paper and then turns around to Hopper. "Thanks! We were just talking about what we should do first."

Hopper starts walking and smooths his mustache down. "I don't know about you, but I could go for something to eat."

They had intentionally skipped breakfast to make room for all the fried food they were going to eat and it was catching up to them.

“Funnel cakes!” Will spins around and grabs Jane’s arm, pulling her from Joyce and walking faster. “They’re like dessert eggos!”

Jane looks at Hopper with wide eyes and hurries to match Will’s pace.

“No running!” Joyce calls after them as Will tries to determine the fastest route to the food tents. “They need to eat real food first. Or, as real as you can get here.”

“That’s a battle I’ve been fighting with the kid for months now. Those frozen waffles make up at least four levels of the food pyramid for her.

Every now and then, Jane turns around to make sure that they haven’t lost Joyce and Hopper in their pursuit of food. He would smile with a small nod and the girl would return the gesture before continuing on.

Joyce smiles down at her shoes as they walk. She didn’t know Hopper when he was a father the first time around, but you never stop being a parent. She loves seeing him interact with Jane. They are a good match.

The smell of oil permeates the air as they happen upon the sea of picnic tables, Will and Jane waving them over to an empty one under an umbrella.

“We picked this one for the shade and because that’s the best booth.” Jane points at the tent just a few yards away. “Will says it has everything we could want.”

Joyce looks at the colorful marquee on the booth advertising everything from banana splits to roasted corn to the highly sought after funnel cakes.

“Make sure you get some real food too. Preferably something that isn’t battered and deep fried.” Hopper hands Jane a wad of cash. “Wait, make sure you come back and tell us if you decide to get food from a different place.”

“We will.” Jane hands Will the money. “Joyce, is there anything

special you would like?”

“Just a water, sweetheart. Thank you for asking.”

Jane smiles and heads off to wait in line with Will.

“What am I?” Hopper mumbles. “Chopped liver?”

Joyce pats his arm as she bites back a laugh. “You can take the first sip if you want.”

“What an honor.”

“She’s so sweet, Hop. She’s always so polite.”

Hopper looks at the kids in the distance, Jane pointing at a picture of funnel cakes topped with whipped cream and strawberries. He shakes his head with a chuckle. “I don’t know where she gets it from.”

“It’s in her nature.”

“Yeah, she’s a good kid.” Hopper takes off his sunglasses and hooks them on the neckline of his shirt. “She has every reason in the world to not be, but she is.”

Joyce thinks of the circumstances this young girl has faced. Taken from her mother, robbed of her childhood, used as a weapon to serve the interest of others. Now she’s just a regular kid with friends who play games and ride bikes who just happens to have telekinetic abilities.

Jane and Will come back almost as soon as they leave to drop off the drinks. Jane holds a large styrofoam cup between her hands, taking a long sip as Will sets down the drinks and hands Joyce a water and a popsicle.

“They said it’s made with real strawberries! You can even see the pieces!”

“It looks good! Do you want to try some?”

“That’s okay, we have to go wait for the food. Come on, Jane.”

Jane takes a big gulp and then hands off the drink to Hopper. "Don't drink it all before I come back."

Joyce looks at Hopper as she wraps a napkin around the popsicle stick. "What is it?"

"I think I know but," he takes a quick sip, "yeah, root beer float. She's been obsessed with these ever since I showed her how to make one."

"It's too hot for ice cream." Joyce shudders before tasting the popsicle. "It's going to curdle in your stomach."

Hopper lets out a loud laugh at her childish reasoning. "Joyce, you know that's not true." He takes a big sip and watches her wince in disgust.

When they were young, Joyce had convinced little Jimmy Hopper that eating ice cream in the summer would end in the dessert spoiling in your tummy. She also convinced him that if you swallowed a watermelon seed, a whole watermelon would grow inside you too.

Her summer treat of choice was always a popsicle. She never ate them fast enough and was perpetually sticky from them melting all over, but it was always a popsicle. A red popsicle specifically.

Joyce liked how the red popsicle stained her lips. Little girls couldn't wear lipstick, especially not bright red lipstick, so Joyce pretended that she was wearing the fanciest makeup after every popsicle.

Hopper remembers her chasing him around, teasing him as she puckered her lips, saying he could be just as pretty if he stopped eating all that ice cream.

Joyce's lips are already taking on the color of the frozen dessert and he thinks of how often he sported pretty red lips as a teenager without ever eating a single popsicle.

Her tongue darts out to the corner of her mouth and she catches him staring. "What?" Joyce grabs for another napkin and pats her lips.

He grins at her as he takes another sip of the root beer float.



“Nothing.”